

---

# GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

---

By

**GRACE MBAVEREN DENEN**

*Department of Sociology,  
Plateau State University,  
Bokkos.*

And

**GEORGE AKWAYA GENYI, Ph.D**

*Department of Political Science,  
Benue State University,  
Makurdi.*

## **Abstract**

*Several decades after independence, International Finance Institutions or development institutions (World Bank, IMF) have continued to “prescribe development models” and policies for African countries, with seemingly little attention paid to the types of governance and institutions that are operational in these countries. These models and policies have failed to produce inclusive, ‘distributive’, and sustainable development in Africa. In addition to external impact on public policy and governance in Africa, this paper has highlighted critical endogenous factors that have accentuated the preponderant failure of governance for economic development. This paper identifies colonial legacies and lack of commitment by the governing and ruling elites of Africa to development, arising from colonial dependent and authoritarian orientation. It is proposed that for development to flourish the state has to be reclaimed through constitutional democracy in order to promote good governance. This paper has highlighted the resultant problems endemic in African states and posits that, good governance is a necessary ingredient for socio-economic and political development in Africa.*

Nationalist struggles by violent and peaceful constitutional means ushered political independence in most African countries in the 1960s and 1970s on the anvil of huge expectations by Africans for socio-economic development. This is truly so because majority of Africans were largely uneducated hence without the advantage of grasping the nature, character and structural composition of the governing framework of newly independent states believed the promises of good life as expressed by emerging African elites. The promises of improved socio-economic conditions were stoutly believed by the populace because they were made by Africans. For nearly six decades after the euphoria of independence has petered out, Africans are at the dawn of the realization that the continents' developmental strides have failed to meet their needs and expectations. The continent is at a crossroad and in search of the path for going forward for development as decades of pretentious efforts have left the continent behind compared with Asia and Latin America.

The failure of the state to enthrone development is palpable in socio-economic and political terms. Africa put mildly is off track in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of 2015 on maternal health, poverty reduction, combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases, gender equality, reduction in infant mortality and environmental sustainability (Omololu, 2011). The African continent is synonymous with squalor. The preponderance of these negative economic indices is a consequence of bad governance. In its wake are issues of dilapidated or collapsed public infrastructure, health and educational facilities, widespread and institutionalized corruption, entrenchment of the culture of impunity and waste, human rights abuse and disregard for the rule of law.

On the political front, the continent is yet to make appreciable and irreversible progress towards constitutional rule and democracy. The second wave of democratization in the 1960s was brazenly reversed in the 1970s. The epileptic recovery of the late 1980s also saw oscillating reversals, relative and intermittent picks in the late 1990s and beyond. In pure qualitative terms, contemporary cases of democracy in Africa can simply be described as authoritarian democracies or presidential monarchies. Elections are compromised to produce autocrats in the garb of democratic leaders that are at best products of illiberal democracies. In office, these leaders simply turn democracy on its head.

The reasons for the sad story of Africa's development efforts are rooted in their histories. A notable referential point is the undisputable colonial legacies that stand as sign posts of authoritarian control and manipulation that undermined state legitimacy. Closely related to this is the corollary of erecting ruling elite that are without commitment to socio-economic development. This paper therefore argues that to reverse the trend and reposition Africa on the part of growth and development, the

African states would have to be reclaimed and restructured in the mould of constitutional democracy in order to enthrone good governance principles and practices.

The paper is divided into four related parts: introductory remarks that underscore the unmistakable level of economic and political decay; a conceptualization of good governance and socio-economic development as exemplars of African renewal and a summation of the underlying causes of stalled development in the continent. Lastly is the thesis of reclaiming the African State on the premises of constitutional democracy for good governance.

### **The Concept of Good Governance**

It is generally acceptable to link the quality of life in any country to the nature and character of governance (Genyi, 2010). The formidable challenge for Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to speed up the process of governance by raising the current level of development to a much higher one. Doing this would require radical transformation of governance input and structures. Following the failure of pro-growth theorization and redirection of development thinking of the 1980s and the subsequent return to people centered development models, the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) as early as the mid 1990s began to lay emphasis on governance approaches that involve developing state wide capacities that were needed to realize development. This ‘new’ framework prioritizes creating pro-poor opportunities that would raise the means of livelihood of the poor and the vulnerable. These measures were designed to amplify the voices, interests and choices of the poor in national decision making frameworks. In addition, good governance measures involved advancing women and youth empowerment objectives through education. This was aimed at removing the barriers that were inherent and historical against women in economy and politics. Thus women would become involved in critical decision making structures of developing countries. Good governance as a broad term also involved environmental sustainability through technological innovations especially in agriculture and industrialization. These new technologies had the dual responsibility and compatibility in protecting the environment but also generating employment opportunities that would enhance livelihoods of the poor and the vulnerable.

By summing and distilling the UNDPs broad view of good governance, Omimi, Ejoor and Shirley (2010) identified eight fundamental elements of good governance. These include participation, consensus orientation in governance, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effective and efficient service delivery, equitable distribution of resources and inclusivity in governance as well as respect for the rule of law. Good governance is totally averse to corruption and abuse of office and seeks to minimize public malfeasance. Good governance entails achieving the projected

goal of sustainable development. This consists of creating economic opportunities with viable alternatives for generating wealth that enhance living conditions of the populace.

The attainment of development through good governance according Sen, (1999) is dependent upon adherence to and activation of the principles of good governance which also should achieve freedom for the people. This includes freedom from fear and anxiety about poverty and insecurity.

For Africa, therefore, the failure of the state to achieve development stemmed from the collapsed public morality which undermined state institutions and the capacity to respect the rule of law. The preponderant manifestation of 'personal rule' from Nigeria to Cote d'ivoire, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroun etc, is a classical example of bad governance. State capacity to deliver public goods has remained largely weak reminiscence in unprecedented corruption and public malfeasance. In the face of brazen corruption and bad governance, development could not be achieved.

### **Socio- economic Development**

The meanings associated with socio-economic development or even development has been largely kaleidoscopic. In general, it is used to describe changes in living conditions and political life of individuals and society. The meaning of development has oscillated from growth to welfare back to growth and again to human centered approaches. This oscillation has evolved since the mid 1940s when growth preoccupied the attention of development thinkers until the late 1960s when Seers (1969) challenged the dominance of growth thinking in the face of growing inequalities, unemployment and poverty. In the 1970s development thinkers pushed for welfare concerns of citizens and countries adopted policies that addressed living conditions as opposed to the growth and expansion in GDP. With economic recession of the 1980s, following the failure of import substitution and industrialization policies in the much of the developing world, international financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) revisited the growth theories of economic development and argued that countries would have to push for economic reforms to spur growth. For sub-Saharan Africa this was the era of the introduction of structural adjustment programmes that ruined their economies leaving them begging for external support. Structural adjustment policies dehumanized Africans. They impoverished the people and exacerbated inequalities. While the state was shrunk by such policies to expand the involvement of the private sector in the economies of African countries, recovery was not recorded. As the economy stalled, African ruling elites sucked the state and primitively accumulated wealth while the people starved. By the 1990s inequality rose phenomenally, and development hopes dimed. For the continent therefore given this ugly experience, development would mean a recreation of Africans

and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake, 1996: 125). Development choices for Africans would have to be made by Africans within the context of African values even in the face of the social onslaught of globalization.

Elaigwu (1998) expresses reservation about achieving development in many African countries even in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, because the excruciating poverty experienced in these states is due largely to poor economic planning and non implementation of appropriate policies; over bloated bureaucracies due to ‘primordial gate crash’ in the recruitment process, as representation rather than efficiency, has become the important criteria for selection and employment into many African public sector. The private sector is encroached upon by government interferences through emasculation and frequent dissolutions and reconstitutions of management boards on partisan basis. The growing degree of squalor and concentration of the ever growing army of unemployed youth incensed by anger and frustration may be a trigger to structural or radical transformation. The continued exposition of corruption in the bureaucracy of the states by a vibrant media and the accompanying uproar points increasingly to this direction.

Socio-economic development for Africa would involve state capacity to direct the development process in such a manner that the governance outcomes would meet citizen expectations. Across Africa, especially the sub-Saharan region, socio-economic development would mean reduced poverty, recreating meaningful living conditions through infrastructure and social services provisioning. This would further enhance generating opportunities for entrepreneurship in furtherance of job opportunities and wealth creation.

### **Governance in Africa**

A syllogism on good governance and development being mutually reinforcing is plausible. The experiences of Europe and North America suffice. These experiences are rooted in state formation. While European states evolved over a long period of time and were conditioned by histories of compelling necessities of war and survival, African states were conditioned by abrupt forces and the forces of imperialism and colonial exigencies. African states are characterized by series of factors that collectively undermine governance. These factors are however rooted in African history and elaborated by contemporary politics.

One of the major aspects of African history with significant impact on the capacity of modern African states to provide the most basic services expected such as security of people and their prosperity, the provision of which justifies the existence of the state is colonialism (Englebert, 2000). Colonial rule was pervasive and created a

powerful authoritarian state to perform functions in the interest of the colonizer against those of the colonized people. In the face of the resentment and hostility of the colonized people the colonial state was both absolute and arbitrary (Ake, 1996).

This authoritative character of the state allowed it to be oppressive and fiercely aggressive rather than open, democratic and developmental in approach to politics and governance. With an authoritative tendency, the colonial state was inevitably corrupt, enmeshing emerging elite in appeasing measures to forestall descent. Selective education, elite exercise of tax administration and authority at regional levels exposed them to skewed socialization that excluded the majority and also attenuated corruption. It is this skewed socialization that nurtured the culture of alienation of the majority and also sowed the seed of corruption exemplified by tribalism and nepotism that are firmly rooted in African politics and governance.

At independence therefore was born a weak state in terms of institutional accountability but yet an authoritarian state in terms of exercise of coercive powers to compel compliance. The state lacked the capacity to engage the citizenry in a robust open democratic approach.

In the 1960s at political independence of many African states, the predominant one party state and even the semblance of multiparty democracy all favored absolute presidencies. Elected political leaders leaned strongly towards authoritarian rule with elites that promoted patrimonial politics and personal rule. They enjoyed exercising power to control, subjugate and dominate rather than develop African societies (Blondel, 1987; Sklar, 1996).

The African ruling and governing elites were taciturnly supported by Western powers, civilian and later military and turned the corner to permit their diversion of state resources and foreign aid in primitive accumulation rather than develop the economy and society. When resentment against these illegitimate leaders began to rise to a dangerous level in the 1980s, IFIs also quickly started to promote democracy which ended up as a system of rule with choices without options. Elections hardly met basic conditions for free and fair contestation as the political space was constrained with few chances for alternative parties and candidates. Election machineries are manipulated and gagged while real voting hardly occurs. In many African countries tension is rife, Nigeria inclusive as a result of widening inequalities, high unemployment in the face of unmitigated corruption and the desperate tendency by the ruling elite to control the governing process. Majority of the citizens are uncontrollably angry and frustrated being locked out of available social and economic opportunities (Mangu, 2010). The experiences of North Africa are sufficient tell tale signs in this direction. It is in these times of tension that African states can be reclaimed to avert the

impending danger by erecting legitimate governments that are just and democratic, open and inclusive and also accountable. The energy of the teeming African youth and perception are called to bear on the reclaiming challenge in order to generate state legitimacy to deliver positive governance outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

There are clearly formidable challenges in promoting good governance in Africa. The litany of constraints is legion. The crop of contemporary elites across Africa is firmly rooted in the authoritarian orientation and corrupt character of the state. Much of this leadership does not believe in state legitimacy or elite legitimacy that is a compelling obligation to deliver on public goods. It favors personal rule under whatever guise and abhors open inclusive constitutional and democratic rule that permits strong and virile state institutions that are inclined to transparent and accountable governments that can deliver on governance outcomes that meet peoples' developmental needs. This is where and why the State must be reclaimed through competitive electoral politics. Until the state is reclaimed and restructured with the rule of law as its operational basis, socio-economic development will continue to elude Africa.

### **Recommendation**

This paper holds that, the only effective weapon for combating African socio-economic and political problem is **good governance**. It should be embraced and enshrined into the African polity and practice of democracy in order to instill: **Rule of law**-African people require faire legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. **Participation**, like rule of law, is very important building blocks of good governance, and can "either be direct or through legitimate institutions or representatives-who will articulate the aspirations of the represented in the decisions that affect their lives.

**Transparency/Accountability**- when decisions are taken, implementation should follow laid down rules and regulations, information about the workings of government institutions should be readily and freely accessed by those affected by such decisions in the manner they will comprehend and render appropriate feedback.

**Efficiency/Effectiveness**-good governance requires the efficient utilization of the resources and opportunity of the society to meet the needs of the people. This takes into cognizance the issues of "who is to produce, what is to be produced, for whom is production", within the framework of capacity development, due process, standard regulation and waste reduction.

**Equity and inclusiveness**-the well being of a nation depends on how well its citizens are integrated into the mainstream of its corporate existence, especially the vulnerable groups-women, youths, the challenged must be provided with opportunities that will

cater for their needs, and contribute their quota in the growth and development of the state. Above all, we all have a responsibility of **collective monitoring** of the process of service, programmes and projects delivery, especially as they affect rural agriculture and non-farm sectors to stem the tide of corruption, inefficiency and the impoverished state of being of the rural dwellers. There can be no meaningful socio-economic and political development when the greater chunk of the nations' population is "trapped" in inhuman conditions in the various rural areas.

### References

- Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Akude, J.E. (2007). *The failure and collapse of the African state: On the example of Nigeria*. FRIDE, [www.fride.org/download/com](http://www.fride.org/download/com), retrieved on 28<sup>th</sup> October
- Blondel, J. (1987). *Political Leadership*. London: Sage Publishers.
- Elaigwu, J.I. (1998). Africa-crisis and challenges: Towards a casual Analysis. *Journal of the Institute of Governance and Social Research*, 1 (1).
- Englebert, P. (2000). *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa*. Boulder & Lynne. London: Rienner publishers
- Genyi, G.A. (2010). Political economy analysis of Nigeria's governance crisis. In *International Journal of Social Policy Research and Development*, 1 (1).
- Mangu, A.M.B. (2011). *State Legitimacy and Leadership Development in Africa*. [www.afrimap.org/english/images/documents/AGFVii-papers-state-legitimacy.pdf](http://www.afrimap.org/english/images/documents/AGFVii-papers-state-legitimacy.pdf)
- Omololu, F. O. (2010). *Vulnerability analysis and policy development in democratic African states*, <http://africa.harvard.edu/apj/2014-call-for-submissions>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. N.Y. Knopf
- Sklar, R. L. (1996). Developmental Democracy. In Nyangoro. J.E. (ed). *Discourses on democracy: Africa in comparative perspective*, Dar-es-salaam: University Press.
- UNDP (1997). Human Development Report/Document.